



Booth

Volume 6 | Issue 7

Article 3

7-18-2014

Gianboy59 Falls In Love With MysteryWhispery

Jacob Grana

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/booth>

Recommended Citation

Grana, Jacob (2014) "Gianboy59 Falls In Love With MysteryWhispery," *Booth*: Vol. 6: Iss. 7, Article 3.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/booth/vol6/iss7/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Booth by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact fgaede@butler.edu.

Gianboy59 Falls In Love With MysteryWhispery

Abstract

Gian sat across from Annette at his kitchen table and was 100% not in love. Ma had said, "You asked her to come here? You *must* be in love." Yes, for forty-something Annette was 100% attractive, and yes, he couldn't believe she was ringless. "Alright, Weirdo," Ma had said. "You're no spring chicken either. What else do you want?" But all those things didn't add up to 100% love. There was nothing between them.

Keywords

relationship, YouTube, roleplay

Cover Page Footnote

"Gianboy59 Falls In Love With MysteryWhispery" was originally published at [Booth](#).



July 18, 2014

Gianboy59 Falls In Love With MysteryWhispery

Fiction by Jacob Grana

Gian sat across from Annette at his kitchen table and was 100% not in love. Ma had said, “You asked her to come here? You *must* be in love.” Yes, for forty-something Annette was 100% attractive, and yes, he couldn’t believe she was ringless. “Alright, Weirdo,” Ma had said. “You’re no spring chicken either. What else do you want?” But all those things didn’t add up to 100% love. There was nothing between them.

Annette was only here because she was the Computer Tutor for Seniors. She’d explained to Gian that she went over laptop hinges, pressed “Power,” touched touchpads, double-clicked, opened Internets, etc. She supposedly had a special patience with the easily annoyed and confused seniors. Like Ma.

Ma came over and plopped her new laptop down in front of them. She stuck her fingernails in its side and tried to open it. Annette said, “Here’s the hinge.” She poked at the front and it clicked open. Ma looked at it.

“What now?” Ma said, and Annette pressed “Power.” Peeking out of Annette’s blouse was a cream-colored bra strap. Gian imagined plucking it and her whole outfit unraveling like a cartoon sweater.

Pay Attention, Ma’s arched eyes said to him. He nodded back, I’m Just Taking Mental Notes. He knew zilch about computers.

He knew other things. He knew how many quarters were in his pocket at any one time. He knew, no matter how dark his sunglasses were, when Rocky the Tech was off

the wagon. He knew if lying were in the Olympics, American high school-kids would sweep the podium. He knew Julie loved Heath Bar Crunch ice cream. Or she had until the Kicking To The Curb, when she threw all the Heath Bar Crunch ice cream he bought her into the trash. He knew minds change. He used to love asparagus. But the other day he put one of Ma's asparagus spears in his mouth and had to spit it back onto the plate. Ma had given him a look, What Did I Do, and he ended up telling her, "It's not you, it's me."

He knew Annette had green eyes, and they were so much softer than Julie's.

Yes, he knew jack squat about computers. His five-time, Big Smile Arcade Employee of the Month, Ben, whom Gian had confided in about his Good Old Days (the garment district success; banging out workouts the Navy Seals couldn't hack; the Cocaine Without Consequences phase, etc.), only showed him the other week how to check Mets scores and read the *New York Post* (for free!) on the computer in the office.

With the laptop Ma had said, "Don't worry, it'll teach me," because she was under the impression that today's computers could speak (she referenced Stephen Hawking's interpretive wheelchair, and Hal in 2001.) That's why he'd gone down to the Mill Basin Community Center right after he brought it home and put in a request for the 100% attractive Annette CTFS. Please show his Ma how to use this thing.

Annette said, "This is the Start Menu."

"I don't know what I'd do without you. We should celebrate," Ma said. "Gian, could you pour us some wine?" Gian grabbed one of the screw-top Zins and poured each of them a glass.

Annette smiled and said, "Thank you." They sipped. No one said anything. Gian could hear the laptop whirring. His skin prickled and not in a good way.

"Excuse me," he said and then casually walked out of the room, up the stairs and into his bedroom.

He shut the bedroom door and lay down on his bed. Out of his jean pocket he pulled the remaining half of his joint.

He was like one of those pros at the arcade, with the Whac-a-Mole game and whacking the plastic moles popping up all over the place. Except, this was no game.

His Moles were real-life embarrassments. Ma guessing Annette's age ("You don't look it though.") And Ma wondering out loud about Annette's diet ("You're probably a skinless chicken kind of girl. I can tell.") And Annette getting an eyeful of their chintzy furniture, and the rabbit ears on top of the TV, etc. He had looked at Annette after each of those Moles, smiled knowingly, and shrugged, What Can You Do? And Annette had smiled back, Don't Worry, I've Seen Worse.

So, Moles: whacked.

Back when he was dating Julie, it was a ritual. She'd scream at him about Being All Over Her and he'd lock the door to their bedroom and puff alone.

Not that he was planning on fighting with anyone tonight.

Not that anyone would be screaming at anyone about Being All Over Them.

He was planning on a good goodbye with a non-Ma woman. A good goodbye with The Computer Tutor For Seniors. Because since Julie, all his non-Ma woman encounters had with ended Thank God This Is Over eyes.

Even Moms at the arcade said goodbye like that. Their squirming children in tow, Thank God This Is Over. Gian waving and wishing he could join them.

He blew his smoke out the window. Soon enough, he was Invincible.

The goodbye with Annette would be at least 85% good. She obviously didn't care about the real life embarrassments. Plus, this was not a date. This was tutoring Ma on Computers. When Annette got up to go, he would stand at the door Invincible. He would smile at Annette very coolly and shrug, See You Around.

When he came back downstairs, Ma said, "Look Gian, I'm being Interactive," and smirked a You Know What I Mean. (He'd told her, "You'll be more Interactive with a laptop. You can stop vegging out on PBS all the time.") Annette was giggling a little loopy. Ma had probably been refilling her glass because, since her seventy-first birthday, she repeated things.

Annette slurred something. Ma's nose ticked. Annette's laugh was like Julie's, right before the Kicking To The Curb, and right after the cop found the eight ball in his pocket.

“I’m tired,” Ma said. “I’m tired,” she said again.

Annette’s laugh was not necessarily a bad thing, or a good thing.

Ma said “I’m tired” again and Annette got the hint and closed the computer. Then Ma gave Gian the Attention Can’t Stay On Me Forever look. She was always telling him, “You know I’m reasonable.”

“You know Gian used to work in the garment district,” Ma said.

Annette nodded, her face pursed, How Did We Get Here? or maybe, Okay, We’ll Go There. Gian couldn’t tell.

“I sold fur coats,” Gian said, very cool and nonchalant.

“He was number one in the store!” Ma blurted out, 100% not helping.

“Wow,” Annette said, unenthusiastically? It was tough to figure out moods when Invincible. Which was not necessarily a bad thing. “Do you still work there?”

Gian shot Ma a Thanks For Taking Them Down This Mole Infested Path look.

He smiled while he pulled out a cigarette. Ma’s nose ticked. He lit the cigarette and tried to take a very cool and nonchalant drag. Ma’s nose ticked again. Annette looked on, expectantly? The smoke pooled between them.

“I left. For political reasons,” he said.

“Where do you work now?”

“I manage a store in a growing retail chain.” Mole: whacked.

“He manages the arcade in Caesar’s Bay,” Ma said, and then went straight into her Coughing Fit. She was always telling Gian, “I can’t stand a lie.” And smoking. Now Annette was maybe thinking he was a Weirdo because he managed an arcade.

“The world . . . the world,” Ma coughed. He could feel Annette’s What Are You Doing? He put out the cigarette.

“So you work at the community center full time?” he said. He held his head in his hand and forced a yawn of I’m Asking For No Particular Reason. Ma covered her mouth and, just like that, stopped coughing. Annette glanced from Gian to Ma and took a sip of wine.

“Yep.”

“You like it . . . ?”

“It pays the bills.” She tossed her brown hair. Definitely sultry-ish. “But it’s not the only thing I do.”

Gian bolted right up. Even Ma got googly-eyed. Annette smiled like this was *Star Search*, all green eyes and white teeth and Knock-Out.

“I make videos for stress relief and as an aid for sleep,” Annette said.

Definitely, she was 100% drunk.

When Julie was 100% drunk she would crawl around on the floor, grab shoes, and scuttle them around the room. If he said anything about it, she’d spit and call him a hypocrite.

“Would you like me to show you?”

Ma topped off Annette’s glass. Gian wanted to shoot Ma a Look How Drunk She Is, but Annette was looking right at him.

“Umm, I’ll have to hook up the VCR,” he said.

“Oh, we don’t need that. I put them on YouTube.” Gian had heard of YouTube like he had heard of Turkmenistan.

“What channel is this?” Ma asked.

Annette re-opened the laptop. “It’s a new thing,” she said. Gian leaned in. Ma braced herself as if this was Tron and they were going to be sucked into the computer.

Annette turned the laptop around.

There was Annette on the screen, beaming like So You Can See Me. Close, but not too close to the camera. She was holding up a book and saying something, though Gian couldn't hear it. The cover of the book said *Interview with the Vampire*. Video Annette tapped her French-tipped fingers on it. Real Annette's fingers were not French-tipped, which was too bad. Still, they were slender, long, Please Look At Me type fingers. Reassuring, We Hold Things Nicely.

"Turn it up," Ma said.

"It's up all the way," Annette said. "It's soft on purpose. You're supposed to wear headphones to get the full effect." She was a teeny bit out of line talking to Ma that way, but he could forgive her for it. She was drunk and he was Invincible. Plus, maybe she didn't know how to deal with real, live scrutiny. Plus, Ma kind of deserved it.

Under the video it said "Relaxing Librarian Roleplay" and "MysteryWhispery" and also "5,028."

"This helps you sleep?" he asked.

"It works for me."

"He doesn't sleep well," Ma said. Gian shot Ma a Don't Start.

"Do you need help finding something?" Video Annette whispered loud enough to hear.

"You don't?" Real Annette asked him.

"Yes!" Ma shouted because sometimes she got tired of repeating things.

"Alright," Real Annette laughed. "Watch it later with headphones. By yourself."

Video Annette whispered, "I can give you some suggestions."

"Okay," Gian said, very cool and nonchalant again. Ma radiated like Mary in one of those Madonna with baby Jesus prints. Yes, this whole Annette asking him to watch her thing was a Big Deal. Yes, it looked like he would not be watching Bob Ross reruns with Ma while she repeated "The world is beautiful" after all.

Ma held her hands out in a Well Look At This. He couldn't help but shoot her an Invincible smirk.

After Annette left, Gian took the laptop up to his room. Ma didn't mind. She was vegging out in front of *American Experience*.

Annette had shaken his hand and said, "Let me know if it works."

"Definitely," he'd told her, cautiously optimistic.

He brushed his teeth, turned off the light and settled into bed. The laptop glowed. Annette had left YouTube on the screen. There was a triangle Play button, like a VCR's. He was now about 25% Invincible, more than enough to press Play.

Video Annette reappeared, tapping her fingers on *Interview with the Vampire*.

"I'll be your librarian," she whispered.

He balanced the laptop on his lap and slid himself down until his chin met chest. Video Annette put down the book and picked up another. What he hadn't noticed before was her corduroy blazer, her hair up in a bun. She was into this. She looked like a person who found things for a living. Head up, eyes strong. And an angular jaw that he would never have noticed if he hadn't seen her dressed as a librarian.

"Do you need help finding something?"

"Yes," Gian said out loud, not sure what else to do.

"Would this interest you?"

He watched her slide her fingers along the book's spine, then open the cover. She opened like there was plenty of time. Like this book was very important. It made his eyes heavy. All over his head he felt a funny fuzzy. A I'm High/Invincible kind of fuzzy. But inside the fuzzy was a tiny Mole: maybe he was a Weirdo. He was watching a woman on the Internet touch a book. He had called one of the guys at Coats Express a Weirdo because he said he liked watching his wife make breakfast. And Gian had smirked when he said it because Gian was Number One In The Store at the time, and could give out consequence-free smirks.

He closed his eyes and the fuzzy pushed the Mole into a corner.

In the darkness, her hands walked onto his head. High stepping, playful. They twirled his hair. They hopped down his cheeks. She said everyone loved this. He breathed softly, “Yes.”

Annette had said to let her know. He had her number. But he couldn’t figure out where to start, other than he wasn’t just a guy in the crowd. Before he at least had a Tutor My Ma On The Laptop pretense.

He wasn’t one of those Internet Web World guys who’d written little notes underneath her video. Guys with Weirdo names: GuyFaux and FuzzyFan79 and RandomFandom.

Tingle Express!

I feel electric when I watch this.

You’re a lifesaver.

He was a real guy who had watched her video (as requested), and by the way it was off the charts. It had knocked him out cold, in his own bed. He didn’t have to spend the night tossing on the couch, with PBS begging for money and Ma nattering at Planet Earth. Wondering if Julie was snuggling up to some guy.

Annette looked great in it.

But it would be easier to say if he didn’t have to say it to her.

At the arcade he commanded the boys to Windex the games. He told Rocky the Tech to go get more coffee. He nodded to the unemployed men who filed in on weekday mornings (he never actually talked to them). He pulled Ben aside and said, “Make sure everyone knows the back office is off limits, okay? You’re a Trooper.”

Gian locked himself in the back and got 100% Invincible with the door to the bay open. The ocean air rolled in sticky, smelling of salty garbage, and soon, pot.

With Julie, there were moments when she wanted to talk. About *Night Court* and *Top Gun* and opening a pizza place one day. In bed, knees under chin talks about Tom Cruise and Sicilian pies. She'd mash her cheeks into her knees and talk like a mush.

But to Julie you could say too much.

He picked up the phone and dialed Annette. While it rang he said loudly, "Rip off the Band-Aid." The other end picked up.

"Hello."

"Hi, it's Gian."

"Ohhh," Annette's voice came through a little cold, a little Okay, So?

"I just wanted to say, really quick, thank you for helping my Ma, and also that I fell asleep to your video."

"Oh, wow" she said, suddenly sounding excited. He leaned forward, unconsciously pressing the phone into his ear.

"It was like fuzzy all over my head."

"You know it's nice to actually hear that. I usually only get to read those little comments under the video."

"That's why I wanted to call you."

"Did you feel anything else?"

"Oh yeah. It knocked me out like you said it would."

She laughed lightly. "You won't believe this but I've been practicing for that." Another light laugh. "You know what? Can you call me later, like tonight? I'm in the middle of something right now..."

"Definitely. I will!"

"Gian?"

“Yeah?”

“It was nice of you to let me know.”

He hung up the phone. Then a fist pump. The office clock said 9:47am. There was still a long way to go.

For that night’s call he had the words ready: Wonderful, Beautiful, Fantastic, and the phrases: I Really Enjoyed It, You Have A Talent, Where’d You Learn This?

“I’ve had it since I was a little girl,” Annette explained. “I remember watching one of my friends color and it was so calming. I have to tell you, if I’m at the supermarket, I sometimes catch myself watching the stock boys stacking. I know, it’s a little perverted.” She laughed and Gian did too. Her laugh didn’t sound that much like Julie’s anymore.

“Can I try something on you?” she asked.

“Okay.” He heard clinking in the background. It sounded like she was getting a glass.

“Annette?” Gian asked.

“Alright, I got it.”

“What?”

“Listen, I want to see if I can do this over the phone.” The clinking came louder. “It’s my bottle of Chanel.”

“Okay.”

“You don’t sound very enthusiastic.”

“No, I am!” Then he remembered, “It’s very Wonderful!”

Annette laughed again. At him? At the word?

“You’re too riled up,” she said. “You’ve got to relax, otherwise it’s not going to work. You promise to relax?”

“Yes,” he said, and slumped.

“You promise to pay attention to me and only me?”

“Yes.”

He heard her fingernails on the Chanel again. “Close your eyes,” she said. He did. Then she whispered, “I got this bottle as a graduation present from my mother. I was so excited to finally wear it. It made me feel special. You don’t smell like perfume with this; it becomes a part of you. That’s why I love it. It blends with your own smell but everybody still notices.” Julie had said something like that too about perfume, but the memory couldn’t get solid in his head. She was floating there, arms crossed ethereally, and then, bye-bye. He sagged even more. He was having trouble holding the phone to his ear. Annette’s voice soaked into all of him. There was 100% something between them.

“Isn’t it nice to look at this?” she whispered.

“It’s lovely,” Gian whispered back.

Mostly they texted. *Lol’d* that they were a little old for this.

He thumbed out little messages in bed, at the arcade, in between bites of sandwich. Which were things his knucklehead workers did and maybe it was a little Weirdo, but he wasn’t going to complain.

Hows work going: what Annette liked to text him in the afternoons. He’d send back: *same old. Nobody knows anything here.* Texted because the boys had let the trash overflow, or given out quarters left and right without asking any customers, “Hey what game is eating them?” Before he would have yelled and sighed and gotten 100% Invincible with the door to the bay open.

Instead he’d sit alone in the back, put his feet up on the desk like a big shot and scroll through her texts.

Gian wanted a date. Or any kind of real, live meeting. He was ready. They had something between them. Plus, he'd already prepped for it, jotted some Conversation Points on the backs of yellow invoice paper from the arcade office. He carried them around and read them like a pocket Bible. (That Dress Is Nice; A Lot Of People Hate W, What About You; The New York Post Is Fun To Read Right.) It was just, Annette never had time. She tutored at night and on the weekends. But what Senior Citizens were so busy during the day that she couldn't tutor them then? Annette said they (Senior Citizens) were a lot busier than you think. Gian told Ma it was a little unbelievable and she said, "You don't think I have things to do during the day?" Then she turned back to the TV and added, "You look like Jim Lehrer now, right after he signs off the news."

Annette made two more videos (showing off her jewelry collection; pretending to give the viewer a haircut) and said to him over the phone, "I have a channel now. You should create a profile and subscribe." Gian had no idea how to be a guy in the Internet Web World but Annette insisted, saying, "It's easy."

Step by step, she coached him over the phone: how to create Gianboy59 as a YouTube account and as an email and subscribe to her (MysteryWhispery's) channel. He signed in and his new Internet Name was up there in the right-hand corner of the screen. He looked at it like one of those curvy funhouse mirrors, wherein lived your second, kind of whacky self. Gian got high; Gianboy59 got tingly. Gian watched PBS with Ma; Gianboy59 watched YouTube by himself. Gian couldn't sleep; Gianboy59 went out like a light. Gian had yet to go on a date with Annette; Gianboy59 texted MysteryWhispery every day.

He bought a hardcover thesaurus and pored over it. He rewrote his Date Notes (That Dress Is Amiable, etc.) He typed out very Infrigidated comments on MysteryWhispery's new YouTube videos. *You are Optimum baby I'm so Somnolent.* MysteryWhispery wrote back, *I love it. Can't get enough.*

On their next call he did most of the talking, his reworked notes spread on his lap. At the end of the call she whispered, "That was like a massage." He whispered back,

“I’m Ebullient and Buoyed by you.” From her soft breathing he knew she was asleep. He told Ma the next morning that his days hadn’t been this Lustrous since Julie.

Ma, who was watching TV, said, “These comedians on TV do live performances.” She didn’t turn her head.

“Yeah, so?” Gian said.

“I thought she could come here and do a live performance.”

“Annette?”

“You know, since everything’s so lust-er-us.”

“She’s not a comedian.”

“She could still do her performance here.”

It was like talking to a parrot. “It doesn’t work that way.”

Ma turned the TV up.

“This is my favorite,” she said. Gian shook his head. Ma smiled her I Couldn’t Be More Pleased smile.

Gianboy59left 38 comments on MysteryWhispery’s videos. Well-wishes: *I hope your having an AMPLE day!!* and, *Wow, who’s that Bonny Lady and Im Swooning over your videos.* He’d get this rush of joy (like cocaine: legs twitching, mouth dry), seeing her on screen. After one really Monstrous day at the arcade, he settled his fingers on the keyboard, closed his eyes, and then typed his most Transparent questions: *what do you use ESC for? how do you make the screen less bright?* And the next day, right under his message, she explained how.

Annette texted him: *I want to tell you something. Personal. Pls check your email.*

He spilled Lo Mein on Julie once. At the time, he was sure he had ulcers from a monthly coat quota and from Sal, the Number Two In The Store, being up his ass. He was also sure that Julie's unspoken wish for a Strong And Silent boyfriend wasn't helping his anxiety. He admitted all this to her, in the middle of their Chinese and rented movie dinner, and she looked at him blankly, shoveling General Tso's into her mouth. Actually, he didn't spill it. He picked up his paper plate filled with Lo Mein and frisbee'd it at her. He also screamed, "Say something, you fucking bitch!" He was high in a whole different way back then. But his heart was on Interactivity.

Gian texted Annette back, *100% I will* and signed in.

My dear Gianboy,

I'm so glad we met. It's hard to meet people these days and I really believe there was someone watching over us when you came in to the community center and asked for a tutor for your mom. I just wanted to tell you that I'm so happy you GET me.

I should also tell you I was married once, to a man who didn't appreciate me half as much as you do. I hope this doesn't bother you, because I'm not trying to hurt you with this information. I just wanted you to know that I have a past, like everybody, but it won't get in the way of OUR future. I didn't think I could tell you this kind of stuff over the phone, so that's why I sent you this email. Thank you so much for everything. I'm so happy we met.

XOXO MysteryWhispery

He felt on fire, in a good way. She couldn't rescind this. Not when it existed on both Ma's laptop and Annette's computer.

He clicked Reply.

No THANK YOU. I'm loving every minute of this. Can't wait to talk to you.

Gian hit Send. He felt Effervescent now. He paced Effervescently around his room.

But on second read his email looked a little Beggarly. Ignominious. Laconic.

When the woman you care about Transparents her heart, you have to Transparent your heart too.

I have a past too. I dated a woman for nine years. We even became fiancés. But she changed her mind about marriage. In all those years we were together I don't think we ever talked the way we talk.

Secondly I had a drug problem once upon a time. That's done now. It screwed up a lot of things in my life but I'm not going back to that. I have to say this is wonderful because I haven't been this open with anyone in a long time and the last time I was it didn't work out so well. You're not only great you're PREPOSTEROUS.

He hit Send and waited. Nervous, but also 75% sure.

Her reply came a few seconds later: a colon and parentheses. She had taught him, if he turned his head sideways, they were a smile.

Annette texted him: *Im free this Friday!* Gian texted back: *yes!* He suggested a Mexican place (*El Rincon Familiar*) to meet up because it had Ambience.

After she confirmed he got down on his bedroom floor and (per notes) banged out pushups. He had one week to show her how Augmented he'd become since watching her videos. He yelled down to Ma, "If you hear any noise up here, don't worry about it, I'm just banging out pushups." He swore off pot and cigarettes for the week and promised his bedroom walls it would be forever if all went well.

The day of the date, he flexed in the mirror and said, "Look how Invincible you are."

He had no car so he met Annette at the restaurant. A big Mole, but when he looked her in the eyes and said, "You're Dia-phan-ous," (per notes) he knew. Mole: whacked.

They sat down at a cramped table and ordered a Nachos With Queso/Guacamole appetizer. There wasn't much space between them. But Annette's smile said, This Whole Date Is Consummate. She was seeing how different he was.

So (per notes), he put on The Smile. The Smile of Number One In The Store. Of I Haven't Even Stepped Foot In An Arcade. Of I Have My Own Place and Fucking A I Know How A Computer Works.

Her smile Evaporated.

“Are you okay?” Annette asked.

“Yeah,” he said. He was that The Naked Emperor, with no bedroom to run into and no chance to change. “Are you?”

“Yeah! I thought you were having like a jaw thing. Sometimes that happens to me.”

“Oh.”

“You want a drink?” She called the waiter over and ordered two glasses of red wine. His planned conversation points were like fireflies gone dark. Annette’s face scrunched. The Nachos With Queso/Guacamole came, and so did the wine. Annette spooned a chip into the dip.

“Are you going to have any?” she asked.

He wasn’t hungry anymore. “I will.”

“So, I’ve been thinking about my next video. What about a makeup roleplay? Would you watch that as a man?”

“Yeah,” was all he could say. He didn’t dare smile. Annette tipped back the wine and gulped. It was what he couldn’t say at the moment. Not with the botched smile and nothing between them. He should have smoked. She gulped her wine like Julie after he told her at the dinner table, “I need help,” because he’d lost not only Number One In The Store, but also the job itself.

“Hello? Is something wrong?”

“No.”

“Do you not want to talk about my videos?” She fingered the stem of her glass, Do You Understand That I’m Trying To Talk To You? Ma said that to him when he was really brushing her off. Then Ma would follow that with, “People need to share things.” And if she were watching Lidia Bastianich on PBS, she’d point to Lidia rolling out dough with her son Joe and say, “See, they have pasta.”

Gian excused himself and went to the bathroom. In the locked stall he sat on the toilet and, on his cellphone, pecked out a message to Annette.

Forget about my Weirdo smile please. It was a mistake. MysteryWhispery you can put me to sleep. That's an amazing talent

Gian gripped the phone with two hands.

You know why Im texting. Love Gianboy59

He cracked open the bathroom door and peeked out. Her back was to him. She was leaning over the table. She was not Julie. He almost dropped his phone when it buzzed.

Annette texted him: a colon and parentheses.

Annette's next video was dedicated to him. "For Gian" right before the title, "Makeup Role Play."

"A little surprise for my Gianboy59," she told him.

And who cared if it was a little Weirdo that a video like that was dedicated to him?

Gian watched it.

And while watching it he felt like she was in his bed with him, arm draped over his chest, teasing goose bumps out of his skin.

Jacob Grana has a B.A. in Creative Writing from Bard College. He has two cats and one wife. He is currently working on a novel.